

**HISTORY OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY  
OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY'S SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS CAMPUS, MONTREAL  
1926 to 2022:  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**December 2023, updated March 2025**

***(A French version is also available)***



**Summary of the study entitled  
*Histoire du stratégie de planification et de développement  
du campus Sir-George-Williams de l'Université Concordia, Montréal, 1926 à 2022*  
(December 2023, updated March 2025)**

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*Note : For sources of information and illustrations, see the study cited above  
(December 2023, updated March 2025),  
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## Context

This document is an executive summary of the study entitled *Histoire de la stratégie de planification et de développement du campus Sir-George-Williams de l'Université Concordia, Montréal, 1926 à 2022* (December 2023, updated March 2025) on the planning and development strategy of the downtown facilities of Sir George Williams College, Sir George Williams University and Concordia University, and their links with the development of this sector of Montreal, over the last century. This study was prepared for the Strategic Planning and Development division of Concordia University as part of the University's second *Master Plan*, notably for the Sir George Williams campus; its content complements information included in the *Étude préalable à l'énoncé de l'intérêt patrimonial* (May 2021) and the *énoncé de l'intérêt patrimonial* of this campus (November 2021).

## Introduction

Over the last century, the downtown campus of Concordia University – known as Sir George Williams (SGW) College from 1926 until 1959, and then as SGW University from 1959 until 1974 – has evolved from a few floors in the Montreal headquarters of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) on Drummond Street to a series of custom-designed university buildings, numerous converted or vacant historic buildings and a handful of rented facilities located in the area bordered by René-Lévesque Boulevard West to the south, Saint-Mathieu Street and Guy Street to the west, De Maisonneuve Boulevard West, Sherbrooke Street West and Sainte-Catherine Street West to the north, and Bishop Street and Crescent Street to the east, plus a satellite building at the southeast corner of Doctor-Penfield Avenue and Côte-des-Neiges Road **1**.



This metamorphosis represented a gradual response not only to the institution's ongoing growth and changing ambitions, but also to the constant evolution and ever-increasing density of the urban and architectural landscape of the western sector of Montreal's downtown core. The task of those responsible for the long-term planning of the institution over time was complicated by the necessity to constantly respond to immediate and urgent space needs and at the same time to prepare for the future, taking into consideration the ongoing evolution of a multitude of internal forces – institutional priorities, educational programs, decisional procedures and financing, for example – and a variety of external issues: trends in university education, the Québec government's strategies regarding higher education, the reality of an anglophone university in a francophone province, the demography of Québec, Montreal's real estate market, property availability, political priorities at the municipal and provincial levels, architectural and planning approaches and societal values, among others.

The long-term planning history of the facilities of SGW College, then SGW University and finally Concordia University, over the last century can be summarized in terms of the evolution, sometimes rapid and other times gradual, of the institution's approaches to five themes:

1. Institutional identity
2. Questions of location and timing
3. Negotiation and consultation
4. Heritage recognition and respect
5. Architectural quality and architectural and urban integration.

### 1. Institutional identity

While its official foundation dates to 1926, the roots of Sir George Williams College, initially the educational department of the Montreal YMCA, can be traced to the early years of the latter institution, which was founded by George Williams (who became Sir George Williams in 1894) in London in 1844 and established in Montreal in 1873. As a result, the College's institutional identity during its first few decades is closely related to that of the YMCA, an association dedicated to the development of the spirits, minds and bodies of young workers **2**. In response to its objective – “the provision of

opportunities for the continued all-round growth and development of each individual up to the full measure of all his normal possibilities” – the College offered personalized guidance on studies, a program of evening courses on subjects relevant to workers (initially, French, Mathematics and Stenography, for example) and specialized lectures that aimed not only to complement the religious and sports activities of the Association but also to allow the young men and women workers of all religions and cultural origins who constituted its main clientele to advance their careers and contribute in a positive manner to the development of society.



During the College’s first two decades, this mission was accomplished, with the help of a handful of professors, in a series of classrooms and offices at the Montreal YMCA headquarters on Drummond Street <sup>3</sup>. But the offerings of the College, like those of the YMCA, had to adjust to new needs and new clientele during the Depression and World War 2. In the 1930s, new courses were introduced in response to the restricted job market, the fierce competition for available positions and the desire of workers to keep and improve their jobs. In 1932, a day program for fulltime students was added to the College’s evening program for part-time students. Registrations continued to increase after university-level courses were introduced, and the first university graduates received their diplomas in 1936-37. During wartime, new courses were developed for military personnel stationed in Montreal as well as future military recruits, and a special program was offered from 1945 until 1948 to help veterans to

qualify for university admission or to join the workforce.



Since student registrations continued to rise during these first few decades, the College’s facilities in the YMCA headquarters were totally inadequate by the end of the 1940s. At the same time, the value of university education was increasingly appreciated during the postwar period and more and more businesses, institutions and government agencies were recruiting employees with degrees. As a result, institutions of higher education across Canada were called upon to respond to the rising demand by preparing to double the number of students they could accept over the next decade.

In the meantime, the institutional identity of SGW College began to evolve. The reception of its charter in 1948 confirmed that it was finally officially recognized by the Québec government as an educational institution; this status allowed it to become a member of the National Council of Canadian Universities and made it eligible, starting in the early 1950s, for government grants to covers its operational costs and certain development projects.

SGW College’s first construction project was financed by funds raised by the YMCA on behalf of the College; inaugurated in 1956, the “New College Building” – which would be renamed the Norris Building in 1964 – was built next to the YMCA headquarters on six small properties purchased by the YMCA <sup>4</sup>. Most of the funding for its interior modification and extension in height in 1959-61, however, came from government sources. This new building allowed the College to introduce an engineering program and to develop other courses.



In 1959, the provincial government approved the modification of the College's charter required to change its name to Sir George Williams University; while this new denomination did not change the functioning of the institution, which had been granting university diplomas since 1936-37, it was symbolically very important for students and professors, and it had a major impact on the way the institution was perceived by other universities, educational associations, government agencies and the public.

In 1960, when registrations continued to rise, those responsible for the long-term planning of SGW University embarked on a period of reflection regarding the institution's identity and future expansion. After examining the possibility of restricting registrations and limiting operational expansion in order to focus on the quality and personalized nature of the education offered, they decided to embrace this period of growth by continuing to welcome all those who merited higher learning, in particular those with daytime jobs, who constituted two-thirds of the student body. Indeed, SGW University's evening programs distinguished it from Québec's other institutions of higher education, which offered almost exclusively daytime programs; its response to this pressing need led several businesses and institutions to pay the registration fees of their employees. The only challenge was that the provincial government, which played an ever-increasing role in establishing standards for universities and financing their operations, did not recognize part-time evening students in its funding calculations.

Another identity-related question that was considered in 1960 focused on the location of the University; as this is discussed in detail later in this summary, suffice it to mention for now that, after careful examination of other possibilities, the University decided to construct a new building on a site that was within a ten-minute walk from the

YMCA headquarters, where it would continue to occupy space, and the "New College Building" <sup>4</sup>, which would continue to accommodate several of its activities and services.

Once these two decisions were made, SGW University launched the planning of an ambitious new construction on the north side of Burnside Street (the future De Maisonneuve Boulevard West) between Bishop and Mackay Streets. It was to accommodate the student population of 5,000 day students (and 10,000 evening students) that was expected by 1970 <sup>5</sup>. In October 1966, thanks to major government grants (more than \$20 million) and its own funding campaign (almost \$7 million), the Henry F. Hall Building (H), then the largest university building in Canada, was inaugurated. A symbol of the University's ambitious vision of the early 1960s, its construction allowed the development of graduate programs, the reinforcement of research programs and the establishment of a reputation as one of the province's most progressive universities.



The University's ambition and confidence in the future that made this project possible between 1961 and 1966 were shared by the city of Montreal, which underwent a major transformation during this period. The first phase of the metro was inaugurated in 1966 and the world's fair, Expo 67, took place the following year. In addition, several new roadways were built in collaboration with the provincial government and a large number of innovative construction projects, mostly built by the private sector, were completed.

In the meantime, however, a third identity-related question – the relationship between SGW University and the YMCA – had to be addressed. Despite its autonomy with regards pedagogical questions and

the increasing portion of its funding covered by the provincial government and registration fees, the University still had to obtain approval for all its long-term development proposals and all its expenses from the association that created it in 1926. Between 1964 and 1969, following a long series of negotiations, it was finally granted financial and operational independence from the YMCA. As a result, it became the owner of the Henry F. Hall Building (H) and a few adjacent properties, but the YMCA remained the owner of the Norris Building, which the University could rent for the symbolic annual sum of \$1 until 1974, by which time it was expected that the next new construction – which comprised a library and classrooms – would be complete; this structure was to be built north of the Henry F. Hall Building (H), where the University was in the process of assembling several small properties.

As it turned out, however, this was not to be. Although its planning began in 1964, the institution's third expansion project would not be completed until 1992, when the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) was finally inaugurated. The University's inability, despite ongoing efforts, to identify a project site that was acceptable to municipal and provincial authorities, discussed later in this summary, was just one of the several reasons for this delay of almost three decades. In addition to the fact that SGW University was struggling to find its new identity following its separation from the YMCA after 40 years of close association, there were several factors beyond its control. At the provincial level, the Parent Commission Report implied the introduction of cégeps, the creation of the Université du Québec, the establishment of the new Ministry of Education (MEQ) with everchanging priorities and increasingly rigid requirements, not to mention the progress of the nationalist movement, which led to the departure from Québec of several businesses and anglophone families (and as a result a number of potential students). On the municipal level, the many impacts of Montreal's lack of a master plan were more and more evident in the changing urban landscape of its downtown, where real estate speculation was rampant, planning decisions seemed to be arbitrary and several Victorian buildings and ensembles were being purchased for demolition and replacement by parking lots as their owners waited for the right moment to build new high-rises. On the community level, citizen organizations were being created to fight against this worrisome trend as well

as the eviction of hundreds of tenants of these historic buildings, which, although in deteriorated condition due to the negligence of their owners, offered affordable downtown rooms and small apartments. Finally, on the institutional level, SGW University students, inspired by student protests and similar movements throughout the western world, called for greater involvement in the Administration's decisions and improved democracy in the classroom; some were prepared to vandalize institutional property to ensure that their voices were heard.

Another of the several factors that contributed to the instability of SGW University's identity during this period was its imminent merger with Loyola College, a Catholic anglophone institution founded by the Jesuits in 1898 that possessed a traditional campus with about 20 buildings dating to between 1914 and 1973 at the western extremity of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce neighbourhood. On the insistence of the Ministry of Education, negotiations between the two institutions – each proud of its own distinct history, values, educational approach and ways of working – began in November 1968; although respectful, these discussions were often difficult, and it wasn't until 1973 that the merger agreement was finally signed.

Concordia University was officially created on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1974. Its name, inspired by the motto of the City of Montreal – “Concordia Salus” or “salvation through harmony,” which recognized the necessity of the city's founding peoples to work together – had a special meaning for the new institution. Its two campuses, linked by a shuttle bus [6](#), initially housed five faculties: the Faculty of Engineering (merged); the Faculty of Commerce (merged); the Faculty of Arts (SGW campus); the Faculty of Sciences (SGW campus); and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Loyola campus). The Faculty of Fine Arts (SGW campus) was added in 1976.

During and following the negotiations of this forced marriage, the team responsible for planning the SGW campus continued to explore different options for its new library and other facilities required to meet the University's future needs, including a building for physical education, a student residence, classrooms, studios, laboratories and offices. But the Ministry of Education had other priorities during this period and, although prepared to support temporary rental facilities, it was not interested in funding

construction projects until the merger was concluded and its impact on the facilities of the two campuses was carefully analyzed. In addition, starting in 1976, the University had to pay high rental rates for its facilities in the Norris Building; these were fortunately reimbursed by the government.



During the first decade of Concordia's existence, the employees of the two former institutions gradually began to get to know each other, to become familiar with each other's campuses and their respective expansion plans, and then to work together to consolidate and prioritize their development projects. In the early 1980s, the University was finally able to convince the Ministry of Education that library facilities were desperately required on both campuses in order to meet the government space standards, and approval for both projects followed in 1985.

In the meantime, after a series of negotiations with the City and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MCA), it was finally agreed in 1979 that the new downtown library would be situated on the south side of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West, opposite the Henry F. Hall Building (H), and in 1983 that it would integrate the façade and front section of the Royal George Apartments; in order to justify the high cost of its site, the building would also include other university departments, administrative units and services. Construction finally began in 1988 and the new J.W. McConnell Building (LB) was inaugurated in 1992, a few years after the inauguration of the expanded Vanier Library on the Loyola campus.

It wasn't until 1989-90, 15 years after its creation, however, that Concordia University really began to work as a single institution rather than as two formerly separate entities. A committee was created to prepare a mission statement aimed at defining its character and guiding its future. In 1991, after consultation with the university community, the following mission statement was adopted:

Concordia is an urban university which is responsive to the needs of a diverse student population as well as to the bilingual and multicultural environment in which it resides. It is a welcoming community where values of equality, non-discrimination and tolerance of diversity are appreciated and actively promoted. Furthermore, Concordia is committed to responsive and innovative leadership in fulfilling the mission of universities to develop and disseminate knowledge and values and to act as a social critic. The University seeks to achieve this end by offering its students inclusive and accessible academic programmes which stress a broad-based interdisciplinary approach to learning as well as by a dedication to superior teaching supported by the best possible research, scholarship, creative activity and service to society. Through these means, the University prepares its graduates, at all levels, to live as informed and responsibly critical citizens who are committed to learning and the spirit of enquiry.

In fact, this mission statement includes many of the values that were at the heart of the institution since the early years of Sir George Williams College – urban university, diversified student population, welcoming community, inclusive and accessible educational programs, broad-based and interdisciplinary approaches to learning, responsive and innovative leadership, high-quality teaching, male and female students, and future citizens who are informed and responsibly critical – with the addition of more recent priorities such as the focus on research, scholarship, creative activity and service to society, as well as contemporary expectations such as equality, non-discrimination and tolerance of diversity.

The dialogue leading up to the mission statement facilitated Concordia's response to another major challenge of the 1990s: the preparation of a *Master Plan* for the two campuses that aimed to consolidate their existing properties and to propose new constructions that would permit the University to

respond to its needs for the future and at the same time eliminate its numerous rental properties, while taking into account its educational and non-educational priorities, the unique character and potential of each building and of each campus and increasingly strict government standards. It goes without saying that this process, described in more detail later in this summary, would involve the move of several departments, administrative units and services from one building to another and in some cases from one campus to the other. Given that many University employees were attached to their building or campus, decisions would sometimes be controversial, but it was generally agreed that it was important to aim for an appropriate balance of individual preferences with considerations of the institution's future.

After a series of consultations, a development option was finally selected in 1998. It proposed the concentration of the pure Sciences at the Loyola campus, where a new, state-of-the-art science building was to be erected; in addition, new, up-to-date facilities for the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science, the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Commerce and Administration (renamed the John Molson School of Management in 2000) were planned for the SGW campus. The University's expansion was strategic: it responded both to the needs of industry for highly-qualified workers with expertise in specific fields (such as information technology and the aerospace industry) and to the Québec government's objective, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to promote a "new economy" focused on these same fields and, as a result, its interest in investing in higher education programs related to them. Concordia University's first *Master Plan* was elaborated in 1999-2001 on the basis of this strategy.

This first *Master Plan* guided the major new construction projects (the Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex (EV) and the John Molson Building (MB)), renovations (the Guy-De Maisonneuve Building (GM) and the Faubourg Building (FB), among others) and urban planning projects (Quartier Concordia) that followed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As their construction was underway, however, the University continued to grow, with registrations rising from 28,000 to 45,000 students between 2002 and 2010, and new properties, including the former Grey Nuns' mother house (GN), were acquired and transformed.

Serving as a dynamic planning tool for both campuses, the *Master Plan* was updated in 2007, 2010 and 2012 to take into account the acquisition and sale of properties, the completion of new buildings, the renovation of other buildings and the gradual abandonment of rental space.

As Concordia University continued to grow, its identity evolved and its vision of its future became clearer. In 2015, the Provost launched a strategic orientation process focused on how it could thrive in the changing landscape. Following a several-step consultation process, nine directions to guide the University's future were formulated:

1. Double our research.
2. Teach for tomorrow.
3. Get your hands dirty.
4. Mix it up.
5. Experiment boldly.
6. Grow smartly.
7. Embrace the city, embrace the world.
8. Go beyond.
9. Take pride.

These orientations aim to identify the measures that need to be taken to facilitate the institution's transition towards a next-generation university, defined as follows:

As a next-generation university, Concordia sets its sights further and more broadly than others. We align the quality of learning opportunities to larger trends and substantial challenges facing society. We pursue technology without losing sight of our humanity. We find inspiration through narrative and dialogue.

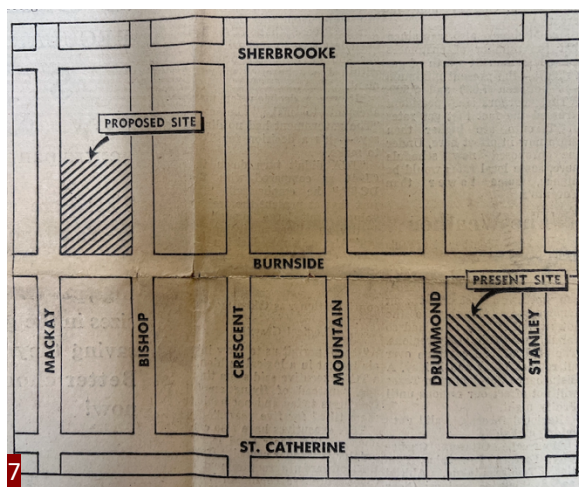
The next-generation approach is guiding the University's second *Master Plan*, which is currently in preparation. Indeed, several aspects of this approach – linking with industry, responding to societal challenges, transdisciplinarity, for example – have been part of Concordia's identity and planning strategy for a long time.

## **2. Questions of location and timing**

It was the original mission of Sir George Williams College – to offer evening courses to young workers close to their workplaces – that determined its location in the western sector of downtown Montreal.

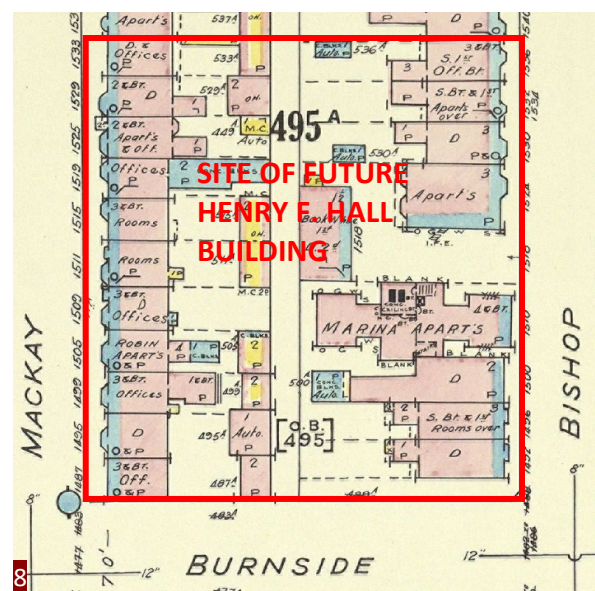
In the late 1940s, when the facilities on a few floors of the YMCA headquarters on Drummond Street were inadequate due to the ongoing increase of student registrations, the question of the location of the new construction was not even raised; due to the College's close relationship with the association that created it, the "New College Building" was erected beside, and linked to, the YMCA **3, 4**. Inaugurated in 1956 and already too small by 1958, this structure, which would be renamed the Norris Building in 1964, was extended in height to accommodate the library in 1959-61.

This extension was nevertheless considered a temporary solution since it was expected that Concordia's student registrations would double between 1960 and 1970. Although it was clear that a new building was required, space beside the existing facilities was limited. After careful examination of other potential locations in 1960-61, the University rejected the option of a large property in a residential neighbourhood with plenty of space for future expansion (a traditional campus) and an offer from the City of properties slated for urban renewal east of downtown. It opted instead for a site that was a short walk away from its existing facilities **3, 4**, which it planned to continue using in the long term **7**.



When it made this decision in 1961, SGW University was fully aware of its implications not only on the selection of the site for the future Henry F. Hall Building (H) **8**, but also for the planning of its future campus: properties in the western section of downtown were small and expensive, and it would be necessary to assemble several of them in order to have a site large enough for a building dedicated to

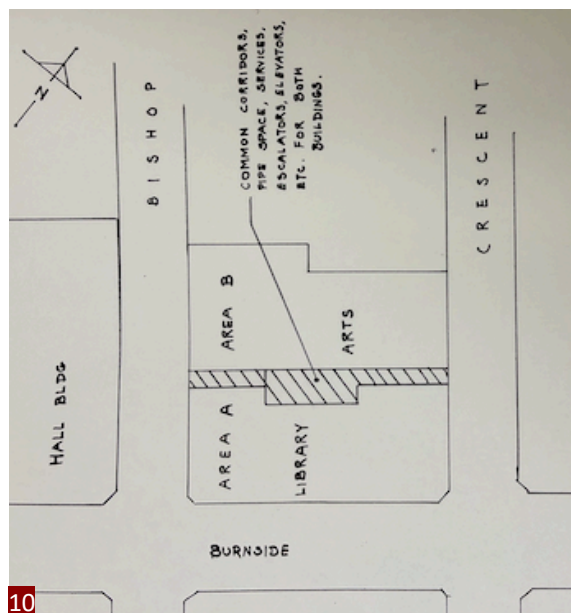
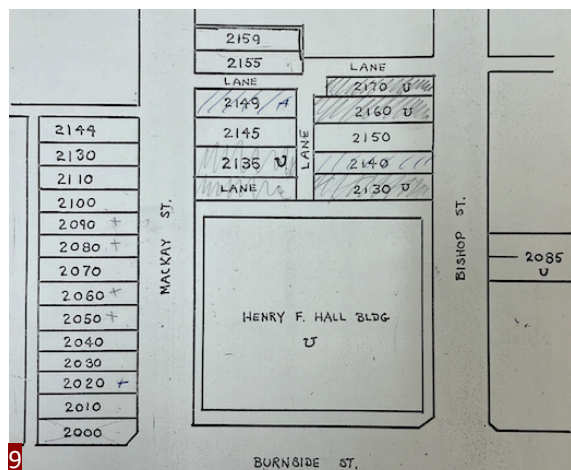
education; in addition, such acquisitions would imply planning in advance, following the downtown real estate market (at the time very active), being proactive and ready to make decisions quickly, and having a reserve fund for real estate since the desired properties would not necessarily be available when financial resources to buy them would be accessible; finally, the great majority of these properties included Victorian buildings transformed into small apartments or rooming houses and, as will be discussed later in this summary, approval for eviction of tenants and demolition, which was not an issue in the 1950s and 1960s, could not be taken for granted a decade later.



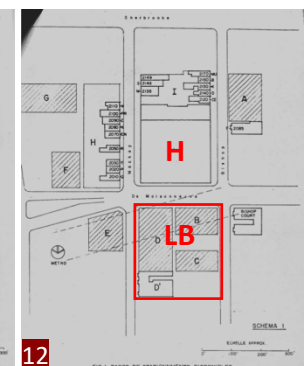
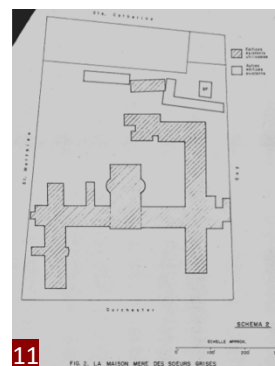
In any case, the assembly and purchase, in 1961-62, of 22 properties on the north side of Burnside Street between Bishop and Mackay Streets for the future Henry F. Hall Building **8** was not a problem, and the Québec government contributed generously to the acquisition costs. At the moment of its inauguration in 1966, it was already evident that this imposing 12-storey structure would become the heart of the future campus of Sir George Williams University. In the meantime, discussions with the YMCA concerning the separation of the two institutions had begun and it was decided that the University would become the owner of the Henry F. Hall Building and would rent its facilities in the Norris Building from the YMCA, at a symbolic rate, until 1974.

Indeed, as mentioned above, SGW University was optimistic about its future at the beginning of the

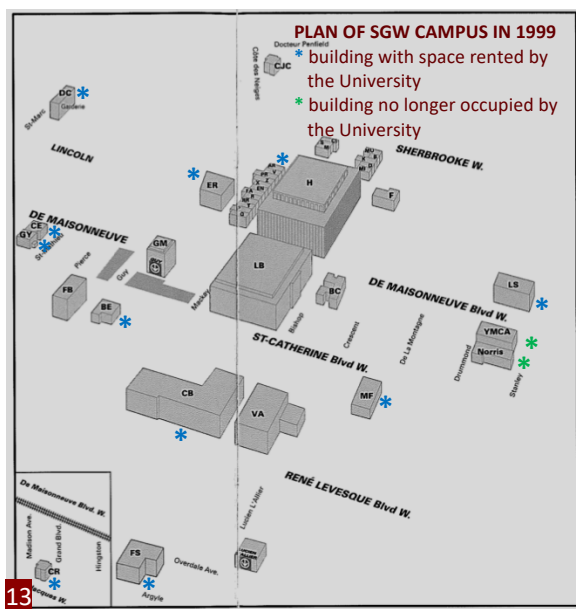
1960s and fully expected that its next project – a new library and new classrooms that would replace the already inadequate facilities in the Norris Building – would be completed by 1974. It already owned a few properties with Victorian townhouses north of the Henry F. Hall Building (H), and the National Trust Company was in the process of negotiating, in its own name, the purchase of the others, as well as a series of properties on the west side of Mackay Street north of Burnside Street <sup>9</sup>. The possibility of constructing its new library and classroom building east of the Henry F. Hall Building, between Bishop and Crescent Streets <sup>10</sup>, was also examined, but this idea was abandoned as soon as it was confirmed that certain properties on this site would not be available in the next five years.



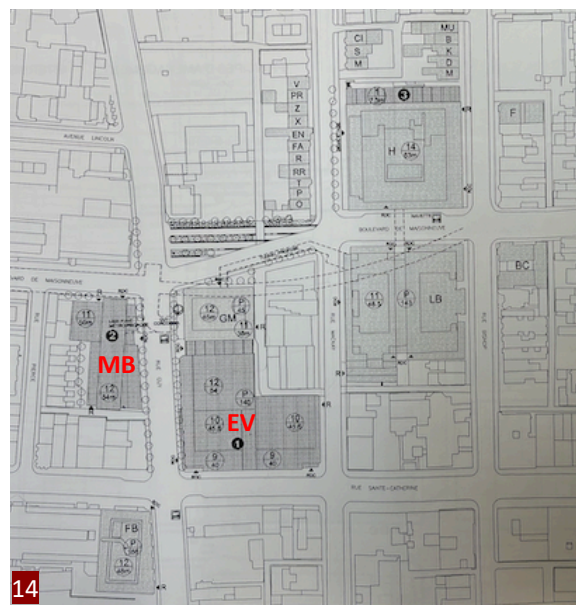
For reasons already discussed, however, it turned out that this project, known today as the J.W. McConnell Building (LB), would not be completed until 1992, and that it would not occupy the properties with several Victorian townhouses and two small apartment buildings purchased for this purpose at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s <sup>9</sup>. In the 1970s, numerous other potential sites – including the property of the Grey Nuns' motherhouse <sup>11</sup>, the Guy Towers Building (today the ER Building, where the University rents space) and several parking lots around the Henry F. Hall Building (H) <sup>12</sup> – were analyzed and rejected for various reasons. It wasn't until 1979 that Concordia University purchased a series of properties directly opposite the Henry F. Hall Building <sup>12</sup>, on De Maisonneuve Boulevard West (as Burnside Street was renamed in 1966); most were occupied by parking lots but a few had buildings. As will be discussed later in this summary, one of the buildings on this site would become the subject of a major controversy.



The 1992 opening of the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) allowed Concordia University to finally vacate its rented facilities in the Norris Building and to consolidate its downtown campus, which still comprised several Victorian townhouses and a few small apartment buildings (mostly converted for university purposes) on Bishop and Mackay Streets, as well as numerous rented spaces (\*) scattered throughout the area <sup>13</sup>. Two of the latter, the Bishop Court Building at the southeast corner of Bishop Street and De Maisonneuve Boulevard West and Visual Arts Building (VA) at the northwest corner of René-Lévesque Boulevard West and Crescent Street, were purchased by the University in 1981 and 1982 respectively. The SGW campus was moving westward and southward.



In 1998, Concordia University adopted its “Long-Term Space Plan” for its two campuses. Encouraged by the Ministry of Education to replace its rental space **13** by new constructions and obligated by the 1992 *Plan d’urbanisme* of the City of Montreal to produce a *Master Plan* showing the future expansion of its two campuses, it purchased, in 1997-98, two large buildings near the Henry F. Hall Building (H) and the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) – the Faubourg tower (now known as the Faubourg Building (FB)), at the southwest corner of Sainte-Catherine Street West and Guy Street, and the Guy-Métro Building (now known as the Guy-De Maisonneuve Building (GM)), at the southeast corner of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West and Guy Street – and acquired, as a donation in 1999, the Canadian Jewish Congress Building (now known as the Samuel Bronfman Building (SB)), at the southeast corner of Doctor-Penfield Avenue and Côte-des-Neiges Road. In addition, it purchased, in 1997-98, two large properties – the abandoned sites of two ambitious construction projects approved in 1988 – including a partly vacant piece of land on Sainte-Catherine Street West between Guy and Mackay Street and a vacant site at the southwest corner of Guy Street and De Maisonneuve Boulevard West **13**. As part of the University’s *Master Plan* of 1999-2001, these two properties became, respectively, the Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex (EV), inaugurated in 2005, and the John Molson Building (MB), in 2009 **14**, as discussed later in this summary.



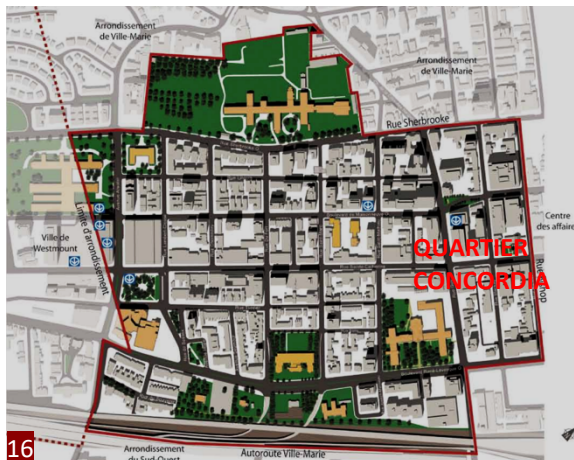
In 2005, the Quartier Concordia initiative – first proposed by the University its *Master Plan* of 1999-2001 **14** as a collaborative project with the City of Montreal and the local community, that aimed to create a distinct character for the SGW campus – was finally approved. Starting in 2008, numerous landscape interventions in both the public and private domains between the university buildings contributed to the unique identity of the area known today as the Quartier Concordia.

Although not foreseen in the *Master Plan* of 1999-2001, the SGW campus of Concordia University continued to expand along the Guy Street corridor, first in 2005 with the donation of the TD-Canada Trust Building (the future Toronto-Dominion Building (TD)), at the northwest corner of Sainte-Catherine Street West, and notably in 2007-13, with the purchase of the property occupied by the Grey Nuns’ motherhouse (the future Grey Nuns’ Building (GN)), located further south, which would be transformed into a student residence, a cafeteria, a daycare, a reading room and meeting rooms between 2007 and 2014 **15**. In 2010, the former Montefiore Club (the future MT Annex), situated on Guy Street opposite the main entrance to this complex, was acquired; it remains vacant today. On Bishop Street, the Octavia-Grace-Ritchie and David-Fraser-Gurd Houses (the future LC and LD Annexes), south of the J.W. McConnell Building (LB), were purchased in 2011; today, these properties are rented for commercial use (LC) or used for university-related purposes (LD).

The *Master Plan* was updated in 2007, 2010 and 2012 to take into account these acquisitions.



In the meantime, in 2011, the City of Montreal adopted, following a public consultation, a “projet particulier d’urbanisme” (PPU) for the “Quartier des grands jardins.” Bordered by Bishop Street to the east, the Ville-Marie Expressway to the south, the western limit of the Ville-Marie Borough (near Atwater Avenue) to the west and Sherbrooke Street West and the western, northern and eastern limits of the Sulpician property to the north, the applicable area of the PPU includes, at its western extremity, the Quartier Concordia **16**. Its numerous objectives include the support of Concordia University’s development plans and the continued collaboration between the City and the University in planning the latter’s expansion, notably by reinforcing the link between the Grey Nuns’ Building (GN) and the rest of Quartier Concordia and the revitalization of Sainte-Catherine Street West.



Since the 2012 update of the *Master Plan* of 1999-2001, only one new construction has been added to the SGW campus. Known as the Learning Square (LS), this prefabricated two-storey classroom structure, which was assembled on a vacant

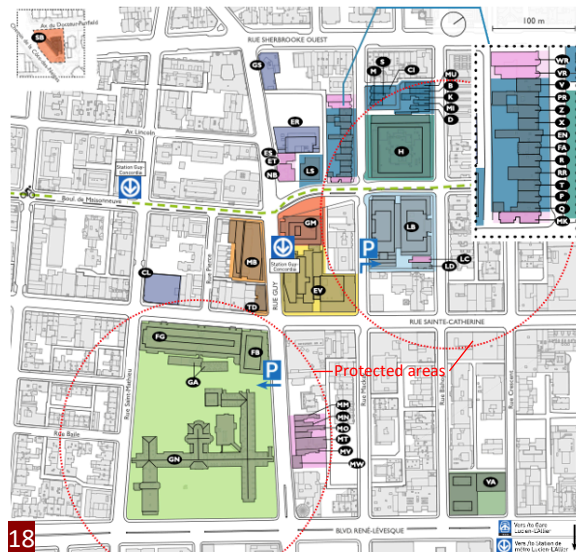
property acquired in 2018 on the north side of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West between Mackay and Guy Streets, serves as a “swing space” while the Henry F. Hall Building (H) and Faubourg Sainte-Catherine Building (FG) are being renovated **17, 18**; it can be easily dismantled and reassembled elsewhere when the time is ripe for the erection of a permanent building on this site.



Since 1912, after several years of waiting and a few years of negotiation, the University acquired other properties for its future development in the sector **18**. Close to the Learning Square (LS) **17**, and south of the ER Building, where it still rents space, it acquired two Victorian townhouses (ES and ET Annexes) and an eight-storey residential and commercial building (NB Building) on Guy Street in 2018 and 2022 respectively. It also acquired, as part of a co-property, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floors and the basements of the Faubourg Sainte-Catherine Building (FG), on Sainte-Catherine Street West north of the Grey Nuns’ Building (GN), in 2012 and 2015 respectively, as well as a small limestone building situated between the FG and GN Buildings (GA Annex) in 2014. Between 2018 and 2020, additional properties on Guy Street, opposite the entrance to the GN Building and adjacent to the MT Annex, were purchased, creating an ensemble of six historic buildings (Annexes MW, MV, MT, MO, MN and MM); four of these recent acquisitions are former residential buildings dating to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the other is a commercial building constructed in 1929-31. Finally, on Mackay Street north of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West, one mixed building (MK Annex) and two Victorian townhouses (WR and VR Annexes) were acquired in 2018 and 2022 respectively, completing the University’s ensemble on the west side of the street, which now comprises 14 adjoining buildings **18**.

Concordia’s second *Master Plan*, which is being prepared in collaboration with the university

community, the City of Montreal, the Québec government and other stakeholders, will include among other things a vision for the expansion and development of the SGW campus that takes into account these recent acquisitions.



This vision also takes into account the acknowledgement, by Concordia University since 2017, that its two campuses are situated on the unceded aboriginal territory of Tiohtià:ke / Montréal.

### 3. Negotiation and consultation

As is the case with all universities and other large Montreal institutions, the relationships between the institution known today as Concordia University and the provincial government, the City of Montreal and the local community, not to mention the relationships within the university community itself and the expectations of all these various stakeholders, have evolved considerably over the last century.

The first architectural projects of Sir George Williams College – the renovation of the former Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, a rented building on Stanley Street, in 1948 and the construction and extension in height of the “New College Building” in 1955-56 and 1959-61 respectively – were designed and realized by a small group of College administrators, in consultation with a few professors and in collaboration with a Montreal architect and representatives of the Montreal YMCA and the

Buildings & Furnishings Bureau of the New York YMCA; at the time, the latter offered its expertise on all projects, approved their plans and participated in their funding. Although projects with permits had to respect municipal bylaws and be approved by the City of Montreal, which also verified the conformity of the completed building, there is no evidence that their site or their design was subjected to negotiation with municipal authorities. And the provincial government was not involved in these projects, except the addition of a storey to the Norris Building, which was largely funded by a federal government’s special capital projects fund until then held in trust by the provincial government.

Between 1961 and 1966, the design and approval of the Henry F. Hall Building (H), a much larger project, was considerably more complex and involved many more individuals and groups. Within the University, the preparation of the functional program “from the inside out,” which was coordinated with great efficiency by the director of SGW’s Planning Office, called for different committees that met with each department, service and administrative unit, and implied several levels of internal approval. The University’s dealings with the City of Montreal on this project, while cordial and respectful, were often frustrating for a number of reasons: the project, as proposed in 1962, required a bylaw modification that applied to part of the site; the principal (today rector) was encouraged to discuss the project directly with municipal councillors and the president of the executive committee at the same time as negotiations were taking place with the City’s Planning Department; while the latter negotiations were positive, 1962 was an election year and elected officials had other priorities; in December 1962, nine months after the University submitted its project, the City proposed that it be built on a series of smaller sites east of downtown; after carefully considering this proposal over the holidays, SGW University politely refused it in January 1963; it wasn’t until April 1963 that the project as proposed and the bylaw modification were finally approved, delaying the construction schedule by a year. On the other hand, the University’s relations with the provincial government, which was funding a large portion of the project, were comparatively efficient and harmonious during this period, despite the transfer of the file from the Ministry of Youth to the newly created Ministry of Education (MEQ) in 1963; this was in large part due to determination of the director of SGW’s Planning Office, who responded

promptly to the MEQ's numerous requests for additional information and justifications, in order to ensure that the building would be ready to welcome students in September 1966.

While the Henry F. Hall Building (H) was sited, designed and constructed in five years, the same phases of next project took 28 years to complete, and included several proposals that were rejected by the City of Montreal or the provincial government at a preliminary stage. The planning for the new construction for the library and other university facilities was launched in 1964 with the purchase of the first properties north of the Henry F. Hall Building and the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) was finally inaugurated in 1992; during that same period, various proposals for a physical education building and a student residence were also explored. It is important to remember, as discussed above, that those years represented a period of instability not only for the University – which was trying to redefine itself after its separation from the YMCA and its merger with Loyola College and was dealing with new expectations from students and staff – but also for the provincial government – which had other priorities and was trying to reform the educational system during a period of rising nationalist sentiment when there were frequent changes of the party in power – and the City of Montreal, which was governed between 1960 and 1986 by a municipal administration whose decisions on urban planning issues often lacked orientation or transparency.

After analyzing several options, the site for the new library building was finally approved by the two levels of government in 1979. Since it included the Royal George Apartments (1912-13), which was situated in the protected area of the classified Bishop Court (1904-05), the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MCA) was involved the negotiations; as discussed in more detail later in this summary, it wasn't until 1988, after several changes in position by the City and the MCA, that Concordia University received the final approval for the demolition of the Royal George Apartments with the exception of its façade and front section, which were to be restored and integrated into the new construction.

During these decades, the University met occasionally with members of the local community, who either supported or opposed its different proposals. In 1975, when the Grey Nuns' motherhouse, except for its chapel, was threatened

with demolition and replacement by the dense mixed-use project, the citizens' group Save Montreal worked in collaboration with Concordia on a counter proposal for the property that involved the restoration and renovation of its historic buildings for university purposes; finally, however, neither proposal was accepted as the sisters decided not to sell their property. Years later, between 1980 and 1988, the University's proposal to demolish the Royal George Apartments, except for its façade and front section (to be restored and integrated into its new library building), was more controversial and led to a several-year battle against certain members of the community. Both projects, discussed later in this summary, received lots of coverage in local media.

Although Concordia University did not construct any new buildings during the 1990s, the decade constituted a period of transition during which it was busy reorganizing certain facilities and preparing for the unprecedented development of its two campuses that followed in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, various internal committees focused on targeted reflections and discussions on academic and planning approaches and priorities, and these were followed by consultations, first with small groups and then with the university community, before decisions were made. As mentioned above, the University's mission statement was formulated in this manner in 1990-91. During the early 1990s, a large number of renovations of existing buildings were realized in preparation for, or as a result of, the moves of departments, services and administrative units due to the opening of the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) and the departure from the Norris Building in 1992, as well as the purchase of the former Loyola High School (on the Loyola campus) around the same time. In parallel with these initiatives, other committees were dedicated to planning the University's long-term expansion not only to meet the needs of new academic approaches and programs in the rapidly changing context of the "new economy," but also to consolidate existing facilities and create new ones in a manner that both respected the character and exploited the development potential of both campuses. The "Long-Term Space Plan" was published in 1998, and it was followed by the "Proposed Space Plan" of 1999. These documents became the foundation of Concordia University's first *Master Plan*, which was prepared in 1999-2001 in collaboration with a team of planning and architectural professionals, and in

consultation with the City of Montreal and the Québec government.

Concordia's first *Master Plan* responded not only to its own necessity to plan for its future – taking into account ever-increasing registrations during the late 1990s, urgent needs related to targeted educational priorities emerging from the “new economy” and its recent property acquisitions – but also to a requirement of the City of Montreal. Since the election of a new municipal administration in 1986, the City had embarked on series of studies, analyses and consultations that became the basis of its first *Plan d'urbanisme* in 1992. This document identified three major challenges: make necessary adjustments to ensure viable development that takes into account short-term and long-term environmental, economic and social impacts; contribute to the growth of Montreal and its reputation as the metropolis of Québec and the centre of a region with 3 million residents, without losing sight of the distinct needs of each of its neighbourhoods; and ensure the development of Montreal to its full potential without compromising its unique character, in particular its significant heritage, its lively residential neighbourhoods and its natural areas.

One of the many objectives of the 1992 *Plan d'urbanisme* was to support institutional activity, including Montreal's university network. The document notes that universities contribute to the city's economy and culture and have a positive impact on its reputation, as well as constituting a major source of employment. Recognizing that expansion of universities (and other institutions) should be in harmony with their milieu and that the timing of their expansion projects is often critical, the *Plan d'urbanisme* proposed the negotiation, with each institution, of a development agreement, that would outline the parameters of its short-term and medium-term projects; at the time, this agreement was referred to as a *plan d'ensemble*, but later it became known as a *plan directeur* (master plan). This agreement would allow the City to adopt a special bylaw and, if necessary, regulatory revisions for each institution, and thus expedite the emission of construction permits for its projects. Following the final approval of Concordia University's *Master Plan* of 1999-2001, the City adopted two bylaws, one for each campus, in 2001, and construction permits for the various projects were issued after more detailed architectural drawings were submitted.

As mentioned already, Concordia University's *Master Plan* was updated in 2007, 2010 and 2012, in order to take into consideration completed projects, shifting priorities and unforeseen development opportunities. Although none of these updates led to a revised bylaw, these documents created a useful tool for discussions with the City of Montreal, which over time became more structured, as well as for consultations with the university community and the local community, which have become an integral part of the University's decisional process.

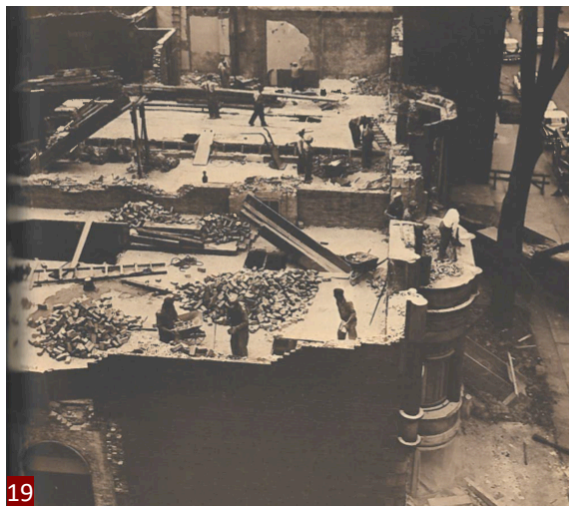
The preparation of Concordia's second *Master Plan* has involved several types of consultation, including approaches that exploit new technologies and an Integrated Design Process (IDP). The exercise began in 2015 with the identification, by the University, of its nine strategic directions for its future (discussed above), and included the elaboration, in collaboration with the Heritage Division of the City and a multidisciplinary group, of a statement of heritage interest (*énoncé de l'intérêt patrimonial*) for each campus (discussed below). In addition to negotiations with the City, it has also involved IDP workshops and other types of consultation with all stakeholders.

#### **4. Heritage recognition and respect**

The notion of heritage, which was not an issue – either for SGW College / University, or for the City of Montreal or the Québec government – in the 1950s or early 1960s when the Norris and Henry F. Hall Buildings were designed, has received increasing consideration in the long-term planning of Concordia University since the 1970s. Over the last 50 years, the institution's approach has evolved gradually, along with the increased heritage awareness of the community, including the public and experts in the field, and the very gradual refinement of heritage guidelines and policies, as well as related laws and bylaws and related tools and practices, by the Québec government and the City of Montreal.

At the end of the 1950s, the City of Montreal evicted several hundred tenants and demolished over a hundred buildings on Drummond, de la Montagne, Crescent and Mackay Streets – mostly Victorian townhouses transformed into apartments, rooming houses and commercial spaces, but also some small early-20<sup>th</sup>-century apartment buildings – in order to link Burnside Street east of Stanley Street to Saint

Luc Street west of Guy Street by the future De Maisonneuve Boulevard West (known as Burnside Street until 1966). This new rapid artery – like Dorchester Street (today René-Lévesque Boulevard West), the widening of which had involved the demolition of several Victorian townhouses and mansions a few years earlier – was expected to relieve downtown traffic congestion. There is very little record, in local newspapers of the day, of public opposition to these projects or of questioning, either by the City administration or citizens, of their multiple impacts on the evicted tenants, the availability of affordable downtown housing, the quality of life of residents whose buildings remained, or the drastically altered character of the urban landscape. Despite the inevitable discontent of those living and working beside the future De Maisonneuve Boulevard West construction site regarding the noise, dirt and access issues it created, and sharp criticism by the opposition parties at city hall regarding its exorbitant cost, the project was generally considered to be a symbol of progress and modernity and a necessity for traffic fluidity in downtown Montreal.



Expropriations for the future De Maisonneuve Boulevard West site were still being negotiated in the mid-1950s when the YMCA purchased and razed six small buildings – five former Victorian townhouses converted into commercial spaces, small apartments and rooming houses, and one small apartment building – to construct the “New College Building” on Drummond Street <sup>4</sup>; this demolition, which marked an important phase in the long-awaited improvement of SGW College’s facilities, was proudly announced and documented

in the College’s journal, *The Georgian* <sup>19</sup>. It is unlikely that anyone at the YMCA or the City of Montreal, or among the neighbours, questioned it, at least publicly.

In November 1963, a few months after the completion of the new section of Burnside Street (to be renamed De Maisonneuve Boulevard West in 1966), the start of the demolition of buildings on Bishop and Mackay Streets – 22 in all, mostly Victorian townhouses converted into small apartments, rooming houses and commercial spaces – to clear the site of the future Henry F. Hall Building (H) was celebrated by Sir George Williams University with a press conference. The importance of this turning point in the institution’s history was underlined when SGW’s principal and the president of the Students’ Undergraduate Society took over the controls of a crane in front of the cameras <sup>20</sup>. Newspaper articles spoke with enthusiasm about the proposed new construction without mentioning the loss of a large part of the area’s built fabric or the 100-odd people who had been evicted from their homes and businesses. To our knowledge, there was no public protest against the project.



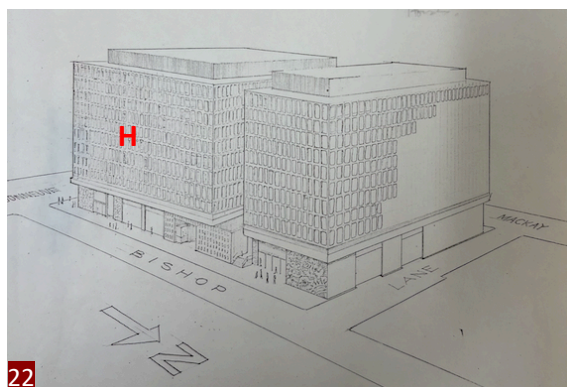
The following year, in 1964, the YMCA began to purchase properties north of the future Henry F. Hall Building (H) – most of which included Victorian townhouses, almost all transformed into small apartments, rooming houses and commercial spaces – with the intention of creating a site large enough to construct SGW University’s new library and classrooms. When the University became owner of these properties in 1966, it continued to purchase properties not only north of the Henry F. Hall Building (on the west side of Bishop Street and the east side of Mackay Street), but also on the west side of Mackay Street (north of De Maisonneuve Boulevard); these were also occupied by

transformed Victorian townhouses as well as a few small apartment buildings.

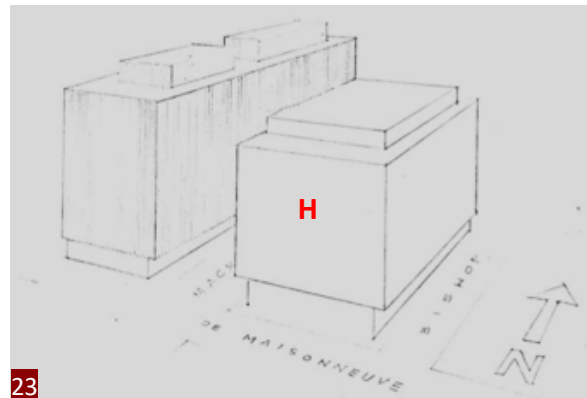
In June 1974, when most of the properties had been acquired <sup>21</sup>, four development options were presented to the City of Montreal and the Ministry of Education (MEQ): the first included a tall new building between Bishop and Mackay Streets north of the Henry F. Hall Building (H) <sup>22</sup>; the second a tall new building on the west side of Mackay Street, north of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West <sup>23</sup>; the third conserved the front sections of all existing buildings on both sites, and added higher constructions behind them <sup>24</sup>; and the fourth involved new constructions of medium height on both sites <sup>25</sup>. But the City, which in preliminary discussions until then had supported the idea of building on these two sites, was no longer enthusiastic and, in any case, the MEQ, which would have to fund the project, was not interested in investing in new constructions for the newly merged University for reasons outlined above. (The Ministry of Cultural Affairs was not involved because none of the properties was at the time classified or included in a protected area, although this would change in 1979, as discussed later.)



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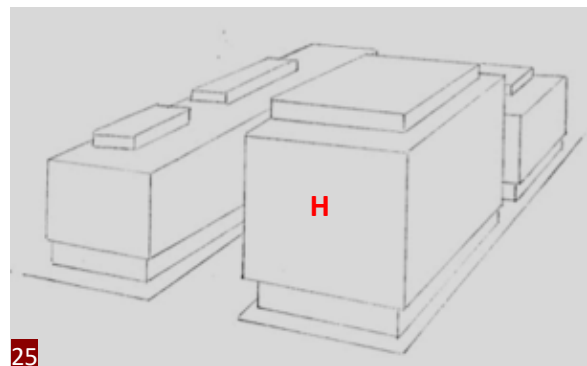
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In the meantime, in September 1973, the Van Horne Mansion (on Sherbrooke Street West, at the northeast corner of Stanley Street) was demolished, with the approval of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, despite a notice of its possible classification and citizen protests, and the City. This loss represented the turning point that launched Montreal's heritage movement. The organizations Save Montreal and Espaces Verts were created a few weeks later; led by individuals dedicated to Montreal's heritage and made up of a handful of professionals and professors and a large number of other citizens who were ready to protest for the cause, they were determined to

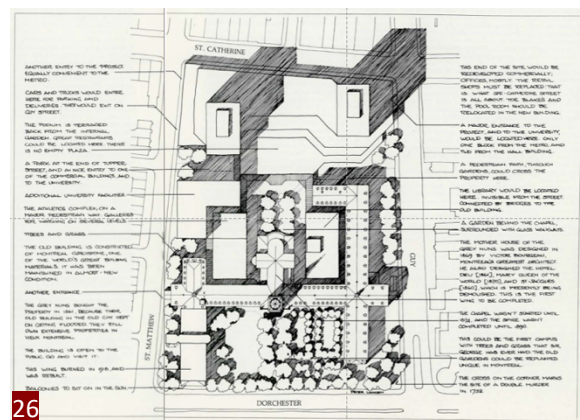
end a trend that was becoming increasingly popular, seemingly with the approval of the municipal administration, in the western section of downtown: speculators were buying series of adjacent small properties, mostly with converted Victorian townhouses, evicting the tenants, obtaining a demolition permit, exploiting a parking lot on the site and profiting from its revenues while waiting for the ideal moment to sell it at a profit to a promoter prepared to construct a high-rise building. Save Montreal was vocal in its opposition not only to the loss of historic buildings but also to the reduction of downtown's affordable housing stock and the negative impact of these demolitions on the neighbourhood's urban landscape and the quality of life of those who lived, worked and studied there. It goes without saying that the organization was not in favour of any of four options proposed by SGW University a few months before it became Concordia University in August 1974 **21 - 25**.

Save Montreal was however ready to support, at the beginning of 1975, Concordia University's attempt to acquire the large property of the Grey Nuns' motherhouse, which was at then for sale **11, 15**; at the time bordered by Dorchester Boulevard West (the future René-Lévesque Boulevard West), Guy Street, Sainte-Catherine Street West and Saint-Mathieu Street, it comprised a recently classified central chapel at the heart of an H-shaped motherhouse, much of which dated to the 1860s and 1870s, as well as some outbuildings of different eras, a series of gardens and a former automobile showroom that was then used for different commercial purposes (the future Faubourg Sainte-Catherine). A foreign developer who was expecting to buy the property proposed to demolish all of its buildings except the chapel and to replace them by a dense commercial and residential development featuring some towers.

In fact, a spokesman for Save Montreal who was an architect worked with Concordia University on a counter-proposal for the site that conserved, restored and renovated its chapel and all of the historic wings of the motherhouse, and added a few new constructions (including a building for physical education and another for library stacks) that were carefully situated in order to respect the property's heritage character **26**. In June 1975, a slight variation of this proposal was submitted by the University to the City, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Finally, however,

when the latter announced its decision to classify the entire property in January 1976, the Grey Nuns decided not to sell and to benefit from the restoration grants for which they were then eligible. Some 25 years later, however, when they would be ready to plan the sale of the property (reduced in area since the 1980s), they would offer it first to the University.

In the meantime, Concordia University, now more sensitive to the importance of recognizing and respecting heritage and obligated to occupy all of its properties due to lack of space, committed itself to the gradual restoration and renovation of its numerous historic buildings north and west of the Henry F. Hall Building (H) **21**; a number of these were converted into offices, small classrooms and other university uses that did not necessitate major transformations.



In addition, in 1976, the University rented Bishop Court, a three-storey, u-shaped apartment building constructed in 1904-05 on Bishop Street (today at the southeast corner of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West), to house some of the Administration offices **27**. The conversion of this residential building into offices, already underway by the owner when the lease was signed, involved some minor internal modifications, but the main façade and the courtyard façades, which were classified by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MCA) that same year, remained intact and their red and beige sandstone walls were restored. In 1979, the building was assigned a protected area, which implied that the MCA would have to approve all projects within a radius of 500 feet (152 m) **18**. The University purchased the property in 1981, but would resell it three decades later, in 2010.



Around the same time, the University rented (in 1976) and then purchased (in 1982) another historic building, this time a 1923 garage at the northwest corner of Dorchester (René-Lévesque) Boulevard West and Crescent Street. It transformed the two- and four-storey concrete structure into classrooms, workshops, studios and offices for the Faculty of Fine Arts, and the new Visual Arts Building (VA) **28** was inaugurated in 1980.



In the meantime, the Royal George Apartments **29**, purchased by the University in 1979 as part of the site for the new library building and situated directly across from the Bishop Court Building **27** and within its protected area **18**, became a source of controversy that lasted almost a decade. Erected in 1912-13, this eight-storey edifice, which in 1979 included 45 apartments and five commercial spaces, mostly vacant, offered a stark contrast to the Bishop Court Building and its other neighbours (mostly Victorian townhouses with red sandstone façades but also a few small stone- and brick-faced apartment buildings) because of its towering height and its richly ornamented white glazed terra cotta façade. In collaboration with the architects and engineers responsible for the library project, Concordia examined the possibility of integrating the

building into the new construction, but this option was considered technically non-viable due to its limited structural capacity and column spacing. In 1983, after both the City and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs had changed position several times, the University obtained “approval in principle” for a solution that involved integrating the restored façade and front section into the new construction and demolishing the rest of the building.



Final approval to proceed with the construction of the library building, however, would take another five years. A large part of the reason for this delay was the opposition of a local architect and the seven tenants who remained in the building, with the support of certain members of the local and university communities, who contended that the Royal George Apartments should remain intact and that its upper storeys should be transformed into a residential cooperative. Their position, which received abundant media coverage, led to the refusal, by the City’s executive committee, of the proposed partial demolition of the building on the basis of the *Bylaw for the protection of residential heritage* of 1978, as well as their legal challenge of the University’s right to evict its tenants, and their

request, following the 1985 change of government, to the new minister of Cultural Affairs reconsider the MCA's previous refusal to classify the building. These efforts to block the project came to an end following three legal decisions in 1985 and 1986 : the Arbitration Commission on the Protection of residential heritage approved the partial demolition (with conditions already foreseen, such as financial compensation for the remaining tenants and the provision several apartments elsewhere in the city); the Superior Court confirmed the legality of the evictions; and the new minister confirmed her agreement with the MCA's previous decision not to classify the property.

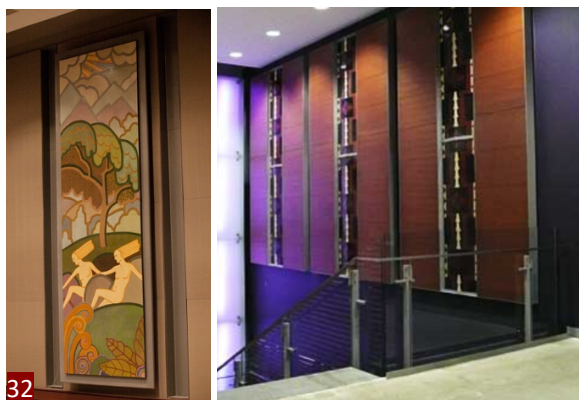
In the meantime, in January 1985 (an election year), the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (which was now responsible for universities) announced a grant that would cover part of the cost of the future J.W. McConnell Building (LB). The design of a version of the project, which was reduced in scope but integrated the restored façade and front section of the Royal George Apartments as planned since 1983 <sup>30</sup>, was finally approved by the City and the MCA in 1988.



The next major heritage challenge faced by the planners of Concordia University was in 1998-2001, and concerned the future of the art deco ensemble made up of the York Cinema and the Lancaster Apartments <sup>31</sup>, situated at the northwest corner of Sainte-Catherine Street West and Mackay Street, on the eastern part of the site of the future Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex (EV) that was acquired by Concordia in 1997-98, as discussed above. Although the York Cinema had no official heritage status, it had been considered “a complete success” with an “excellent state of authenticity” in 1989, when it was purchased by a developer and, since part of its theatre was within the protected area of the Bishop Court Building <sup>18</sup>, the Ministry of Culture and

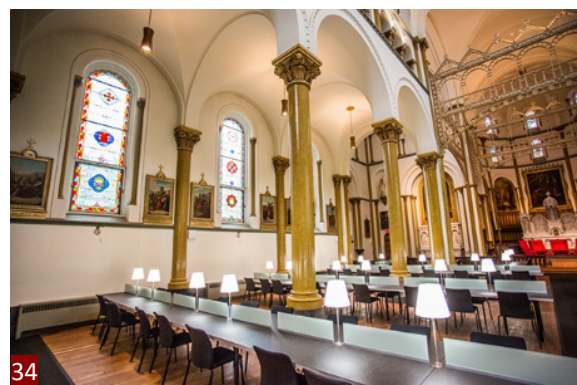
Communications (MCCQ) – as the MCA had been renamed – had a say regarding its future. When the University purchased the property, however, the ensemble – which had been vacant, unheated, squatted and vandalized for ten years, as well as damaged by a fire in the adjacent building – was in a state of advanced deterioration. In 1999-2000, six different expert studies were carried out on the heritage interest, the structural condition and the restoration and rehabilitation potential of the ensemble or the theatre. As these were not conclusive – there were different opinions, notably on the state of the theatre and the viability of its restoration – a final study was commissioned to summarize them, consider any new information and make a recommendation. This study, submitted to the University, the City and the MCCQ in May 2001, reassessed the heritage value of the theatre and justified the demolition of the ensemble on the basis of a re-evaluation of its heritage value, its deteriorated condition, the high cost of its potential restoration, the technical implications of its potential rehabilitation, the educational mission of the University and, finally, the very high quality of the proposed replacement project. The demolition was then approved and the ensemble disappeared in August 2001. The history of the site is nonetheless evoked in the interior of the EV Integrated Complex, completed in 2005 and discussed in more detail below, thanks to the integration of murals from the York Cinema and metal panels from the Lancaster Apartments <sup>32</sup>, and the curtain wall of the new building's east façade features an artwork that recalls, among other aspects of the history of the site, the theatre's large screen <sup>33</sup>.





Between 2007 and 2014, Concordia University realized a major heritage project: the restoration and renovation of the southern part of the former Grey Nuns' property – including the chapel, motherhouse and gardens (GN) [15, 18](#) –, which it purchased in phases between 2007 and 2013. This emblematic ensemble, much of which dates to the 1860s and 1870s, was designated a “National Historic Site of Canada” by the federal government in 2011 and, as mentioned above, is part of the site classified in 1975 and 1976 by the provincial government. Taking into consideration its historic and architectural values, the former chapel was respectfully transformed into a silent reading and study room [34](#), the former “community room” became a multifunctional room and the former dining hall a contemporary cafeteria. In addition, the central wing accommodated a series of small meeting rooms, and the other sections of the former motherhouse were transformed into residences for 660 students [35](#); it is possible that this last occupation, considered from the start as a temporary solution due to the lack of student housing on the SGW campus, will one day be replaced by other university facilities that are compatible with the building's heritage character. In

2016, the gardens, restored and embellished with new landscape features, were opened to the university community, and in 2018 the masonry of the belltower was stabilized and restored. Finally, the tangible and intangible heritage values of this rich place of memory have become the subject of several research-action projects, notably by the University's History and Art History Departments.



North of the Grey Nuns' Building (GN), and accessible from the garden and from Saint-Mathieu Street, is the former “men's house” of 1869 and its extension. This small property, separated from the south part of the former Grey Nun's property since the 1980s, was purchased by the University in 2014. Its building, known as the Grey Nuns' Annex (GA), was respectfully transformed in 2014-15 into the University's Observation Nursery and other facilities of the Education Department [18](#). Around the same time, the offices and classrooms of this department moved into the freshly renovated 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floors of the neighbouring building to the north, the Faubourg Sainte-Catherine (FG); Concordia became co-owner of this property, which was also separated from the south part of the Grey Nuns' property in the 1980s,

in 2012 (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floors) and 2015 (basements), and its interiors were de-classified in 2015.

It is not possible to discuss the heritage of the SGW campus without mentioning the dozens of historic buildings acquired over the last six decades, initially by the YMCA (in 1964 and 1965) and then the University (since 1966) <sup>18</sup>. Most of these are converted Victorian townhouses and small apartment buildings dating to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but exceptions include the former Montefiore Club of 1907 (MT), the former Bank of Toronto branch of 1908 (TD), and the former Canadian Jewish Congress headquarters of 1967 (SB). With the exception of a number of acquisitions between 2018 and 2022, most of these have been restored and renovated, over the years, to serve appropriate university functions. In addition to contributing to the rich architectural diversity of the SGW campus, these buildings and ensembles form an integral part of the urban landscapes of the western sector of downtown.

As part of the preparation of its second *Master Plan*, Concordia University and its consultants realized, in collaboration with the City of Montreal, a major heritage-related study on the buildings of the SGW campus in 2020-21. This study led the formulation, by a multidisciplinary group created by the City's Heritage Division, of a statement of the heritage interest of the campus in 2021. These two documents constitute valuable tools for guiding decisions about the future of the campus.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that Concordia University's website presents a panoply of relevant information on its history and its properties, confirming the importance and pride that the institution attributes to its rich heritage. In addition, the holdings of the University's Record Management and Archives (RMA) Division include a wealth of valuable additional resources related to the institution's material and immaterial heritage.

### **5. Architectural quality and architectural and urban integration**

Since the 1950s, the institution known today as Concordia University has attributed a great deal of importance to the architectural quality, in terms of design and execution, of each of its new, custom-designed facilities on the SGW campus: the Norris

Building of 1956 <sup>4</sup>, extended in height in 1961 <sup>36</sup>; the Henry F. Hall Building (H) of 1966 <sup>5, 37</sup>; the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) of 1992 <sup>30, 38</sup>; the Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex (EV) of 2005 <sup>39</sup>; the John Molson Building (MB) of 2009 <sup>40</sup>; and the Learning Square (LS) of 2019 <sup>17</sup>. At the time of its construction, each of these buildings symbolized – with its up-to-date architectural language and its interior arrangement and equipment in accordance with the most recent trends of North American universities – the institution's advancement and expansion and the ongoing improvement of its ability to respond to the changing needs of society and of its growing student population. In addition, each represents a testimony to the architectural approach of its day – in terms of materials, construction technology, architectural expression and interior arrangement and fittings – and contributes to Montreal's impressive repertoire of university facilities of architectural interest, as well as to the rich architectural diversity of downtown's western sector.





That said, with the exception of the Learning Square (LS) **17**, which was designed very recently as a temporary modular structure, these buildings **36 - 40** are, for functional reasons related to their vocation, very large: apart from the Norris Building **4, 36**, they occupy larger footprints than most of their neighbours and rise above them. In the western section of downtown Montreal, many large-scale buildings constructed during the 19-teens, 1920s and 1930s integrate well with their surroundings, often composed of small-scale buildings, despite their different typology, thanks to careful attention to their massing and materials, as well as the modulation, expression, materials and details of their façades; examples include the certain high-rises like the Drummond Medical Building (1929) on Drummond Street and the Medical Arts Building (1923) and apartment towers like The Acadia (1925) and the Château (1926) on Sherbrooke Street West.

When SGW University was ready to begin its expansion in the 1950s and 1960s, however, architectural and urban integration was no longer considered a priority in Montreal and other cities across North America. Indeed, the objective was often to ensure that a new construction stood apart from its older context in order to emphasize its modernity, considered a symbol of progress, and where relevant to affirm its monumentality; this phenomenon is illustrated by several commercial and residential towers downtown, including a handful near the University, such as the Guy Towers Building (1954, now known as the ER Building by Concordia, which rents space there) and the Guy-Métro Building (1965, now Concordia's Guy-De Maisonneuve Building (GM)) on Guy Street, and various 1960s high-rises on Sherbrooke Street West and Sainte-Catherine Street West.

At the time of its construction, the Norris Building of 1956-61 represented a relatively discreet architectural and urban insertion due to its modest height, even with its added fifth storey, its insertion between two adjacent buildings and the fact that Drummond and Stanley Streets between Sainte-Catherine Street West and Sherbrooke Street West were already bordered in part by 10-12-storey buildings [4](#), [36](#), [41](#). Its façades on Drummond and Stanley Streets nonetheless offered a significant contrast to those of their context – residential, commercial and institutional buildings of different scales, heights and architectural expressions dating to before 1930 – because of their modern language, yellow-brown brick cladding, horizontal proportions and ribbon windows.



The architectural integration of the Henry F. Hall Building (H), designed and built between 1961 and 1966 [5](#), [37](#), [42](#), is much less discreet. The immense 12-storey cubic volume was the third highrise to front on the new section of Burnside Street between Guy and Stanley Streets (renamed De Maisonneuve Boulevard West in 1966); like the narrow, 12-storey tower at the corner of Mountain Street (1962-63) and the other cubic volume, the Guy-Métro Building (1965, today Concordia's Guy-De-Maisonneuve Building (GM)) at the corner of Guy Street, the Henry F. Hall Building responded to a Montreal bylaw that called for tall buildings on either side of this wide and rapid thoroughfare in order to reinforce the modernity of the city's downtown area, which was then expanding westward. (That said, it was

necessary to modify this bylaw in order to permit the building's proposed depth.) The buildings that border this street began to change very gradually during the 1980s, and continue to evolve to this day.



Clad mostly in prefabricated concrete panels with integrated windows, the Henry F. Hall Building (H) offered a stark contrast to its immediate neighbours, which in the early 1960s were for the most part stone-faced, three-storey Victorian townhouses and a few three- and four-storey apartment buildings clad in brick [42](#). During its first few decades, when the automobile was still prioritized in Montreal despite the new metro system, the monumentality and visibility of the Henry F. Hall Building were emphasized by the six lanes of rapid traffic that passed in front of its main entrance on the new De Maisonneuve Boulevard West and by the parking lots directly opposite it.

In the early 1970s, Montrealers began to question the impact of modernist monuments on their city. Following the example of Jane Jacobs, a New York urban militant who had moved to Toronto, and in keeping with citizen movements throughout North America, they demanded more attention to the human scale and pedestrian experience of their streets, the reinforcement of a mix of uses and the quality of life of their downtown neighbourhoods, the preservation and rehabilitation of the existing built fabric and new constructions that respect their context and contribute to the social and economic vitality of their urban milieu. In response to these demands and in keeping with trends in other Canadian cities, the City of Montreal introduced the notion of *plans d'ensemble* in an effort to improve the architectural and urban integration of each large real estate project with the characteristics of its

particular context. In 1992, Montreal's first *Urban Plan*, the result of a series of studies and public consultations, aimed to provide a framework for the future development of the city's downtown along these lines.

This renewed concern for architectural and urban integration had an impact on the 1980s design of the library complex, known as the J.W. McConnell Building (LB) at the time of its inauguration in 1992. Despite its monumental scale and its contemporary expression, it established an interesting dialogue with its very heterogeneous context **30, 38, 43**: the modulation of its massing responded to the varying heights of its numerous neighbours on the three streets that surround it; the colours and textures of its cladding were inspired by the many materials and textures of nearby façades; the arcades and large windows at street level enriched the experience of those who passed by it; the integration of the restored glazed white ornamental terra cotta façade and front section of the Royal George Apartments paid homage to this unique architectural specimen, which has stood apart from its context since its construction in 1912-13; the internal organization of the complex around a large north-south atrium recalled the lane that used to cross the site; and the integration, in this atrium, of a work of art that made reference to literature offered a constant reminder of the building's *raison d'être*.



Concordia University's *Master Plan* of 1999-2001, developed in collaboration with the City of Montreal, brought the notion of architectural and urban integration to a whole new level. The objective to create an innovative signature building at the corner of Guy Street and Sainte-Catherine Street West was met by the design of the new Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex (EV) **32, 33, 39, 44, 45** thanks to the following qualities: the complex massing of its two towers; its elegant and sophisticated architectural language; its curtain walls of different tints, with divisions of varying proportions; its commercial spaces and art gallery fronting on Sainte-Catherine Street West; its interior atriums and spaces for interaction between professors and students of different disciplines; its advanced construction technology and environmental approach; and the inclusion of vestiges of the York Cinema and the Lancaster Apartments in its interior decor. In addition, the work of art featured on the curtain wall of its east (Mackay Street) façade evokes Montreal's founding peoples and Concordia University's diverse community, recalls the York Cinema and provokes a dialogue with its context. Although this complex stands apart from its neighbours – which represent many different scales, heights, typologies, architectural expressions and construction periods – it has served since its inauguration in 2005 as a memorable landmark in the urban landscape of the neighbourhood now known as Quartier Concordia and a strong symbol of the University's major contribution to Montreal's cultural, economic and social vitality at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.





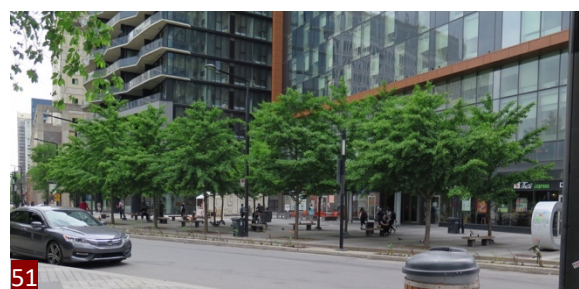
The completion in 2009 of the John Molson Building (MB) at the southwest corner of Guy Street and De Maisonneuve Boulevard West [40, 46, 47](#) and the 2011 replacement of the 1965 concrete cladding and square windows of the Guy-De Maisonneuve Building (GM) by a new energy-efficient curtain wall at the southeast corner of this same intersection [48, 49](#) reinforced Concordia University's presence in this sector. Despite their different massing – the MB Building is an elegant tower and the GM Building is a massive cubic block – and their distinctive detailing, these two buildings feature façades and materials that are similar to those of the EV Complex [48, 49](#); the three structures form a coherent ensemble of contemporary architectural expression that both contrasts with and integrates with the diverse urban landscapes of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West, Guy Street and Sainte-Catherine Street West [44 - 49](#). The John Molson Building also features an innovative solar panel on the upper part of its west (technically southwest) façade, one of the many reasons for its LEED (“Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design”) accreditation, silver level. Finally, the innovative work of art that embellishes the lower part of its north façade makes reference to the best universities in North America, to the inclusive character of Concordia University and to its urban context [47](#).





Finally, it is the Quartier Concordia project that links the numerous facilities of the SGW campus and reinforces the identity of Concordia University in the city **49 - 51**. The idea was foreseen in the *Master Plan* of 1999-2001 **14** and the concept was elaborated starting in 2003, in collaboration with the City of Montreal and in consultation with the local community, and realized in stages since 2008, but remains incomplete today. The Quartier Concordia initiative, which covers the area of 1.5 square miles (4 km<sup>2</sup>) that the institution occupies in the western sector of downtown, comprises a number of landscape interventions in both the public and private domains: the planting of new trees; the addition of vegetation; the integration of urban furnishings; the expansion, redesign and reconstruction of Place Norman-Bethune (on both sides of De Maisonneuve Boulevard West, east of Guy Street) and the restoration of the statue of Dr. Bethune; improved pedestrian security at intersections; the construction and landscaping of a

bicycle path; the introduction of consistent signage; the improvement of lighting; the installation of public art; the improvement of the interface between buildings and sidewalks (by terrasses, large windows, welcoming entrances and lobbies, for example); and the creation of a dynamic milieu that facilitates interpersonal exchanges as well as a diversity of organized and spontaneous social and cultural activities.



For more than a decade, Concordia's Sir-George-Williams campus has been an attractive and inclusive destination that makes a major contribution to the revitalization and diversity of the urban and architectural landscape of Montreal. Even in its incomplete state, Quartier Concordia provides a daily reminder of the numerous links between the development of the University and the development of this sector of downtown since Sir George Williams College was founded almost a century ago.